

ETNOFOOR anthropological journal

Call for papers: Taste

The next issue of ETNOFOOR will be dedicated to the matter of taste. Taste points literally and metaphorically to the flavour of life; taste is sensual connection. It concerns processes of communion through food, style or knowledge, all of which communicate social positioning and relations of hierarchy. As a verb, 'to taste' means to undergo, to experience, to try; tasting is an active process of coming into contact, or being in contact, with things or ideas. As a noun, taste indicates processes of discrimination, of judgement regarding style. On a daily basis, people make choices about food, dress, opinions, and much more, that are based on private and subjective preferences of individual taste, and yet these decisions point to taste patterns that indicate socially binding standards of conduct. ETNOFOOR provisionally distinguishes three areas for the study of taste, although they intersect in many ways: taste in relation to the appreciation of food; taste as aesthetic preference; and the methodological implications of taste in ethnographic research. We are interested in papers dealing with the matter of taste from these various perspectives.

#### *Food appreciation*

Food is an important cultural marker of identity and it has provided a medium for the understanding of social relations, family and kinship, class and consumption, gender ideology, and cultural symbolism (Mintz and Du Bois 2002). Food is also central to cultural identity in the way it provokes memory (Seremetakis 1994; Sutton 2001). Enjoying a good meal is a universal human capacity, and comes in many forms and guises, and its evaluation ranges from the appreciation of food and drinks, to the presence of good company and ambience, or to the (non)use of eating utensils (Mann et al. 2011). From *haute cuisine* to fast-food, the taste of a meal depends on a set of variables that are the traditional starting points for anthropological research: who does what, where and with whom. The physiological necessity of eating connects to culturally-produced desires and, as a result, having a meal and tasting food are situational practices that depend on social class, gender, age and much more. Food appreciation is a cultural practice par excellence: to taste is to perceive or recognize through the tongue, to distinguish the flavour, and to enjoy or dislike it; all processes based on cultural values. *Haute cuisine*, for example, celebrates distinction or refinement over bodily drives, whereas other kitchen philosophies favour the satisfied feeling of a filled stomach. We are interested to learn more about cultural registers of value underlying eating and food appreciation. How do different people (learn to) appreciate food? How do people define a tasty meal? How does taste relate to cultural identity in a globalizing world in which food has become simultaneously local and global (Phillips 2006), for example with the case of 'slow food', an international movement that celebrates local traditional dishes and cooking styles?

#### *Aesthetic preferences*

The ability to appreciate the 'good things in life' can become an indication of social status or group membership. Taste is thus also an aesthetic value and, as such, points to a wider understanding of taste as cultural patterns regarding dress, art, consumption, music et cetera. As such, taste is central to processes of social stratification (Bourdieu 1987).

Differences between 'good taste' and 'bad taste' create and represent a social hierarchy of connoisseurs and lay people (Douglas 1996; Gans 1999; Nickles 2002). Exhibiting good taste

in cultural products can be an important mechanism for retaining control over resources and symbolic representations of power. Furthermore, rather than seeing taste as a secondary form, as expressing a prior identity, we may take it as 'forming form' that gives birth to collective manners of being, representations and the various fashions and styles by which life in society is expressed (Maffesoli 1996: 5). Maffesoli points to the 'affective ambience' (1996: 57) produced by sharing aesthetic sensation as underlying new forms of sociality. The question, then, is how taste also shapes a person's individuality. Ferguson employs the notion of taste or style as 'a signifying practice' that indicates 'socially significant positions and allegiances': '[I]t is not simply a matter of choosing a style to fit the occasion, for the availability of such choices depends on internalized capabilities of performative competence and ease that must be achieved, not adopted' (Ferguson 1999: 96). Rather than interpreting the adherence to proper etiquette as rule-governed behaviour or empty ritual, we wonder how the cultivation of such behaviour shapes and heightens aesthetic delight and individual agency, in relation to social hierarchies. We are interested in papers that further explore the relationship between taste as aesthetic practices and sensation, about processes of collective bonding, in- and exclusion, cultural power, and people's agency therein (see also Panagia, 2009; Rancière 2006). Aesthetic delight may strengthen the social bond; but one first needs to possess the ability to engage in particular aesthetic pleasures; how and when are people accepted, or not? What are the underlying principles of the moralisation of taste, of good vs bad taste, of beauty vs ugliness? When and how are children or novices socialised?

### *Ethnography*

Aesthetic recognition and mutuality as key mechanisms of social integration bring us to the third domain of taste ETNOFOOR would like to see explored: the methodological implications of taste in ethnographic research. In *The Taste of Ethnographic Things*, Stoller demonstrates the rewards of his increased sensual awareness of cultural knowledge through long-term participation in the lives of people from the Songhay ethnic group in Niger. This is an important point to make in the current era where short-term fieldwork phases seem to have become the *modus operandi*. While Stoller demonstrates the rewards of long-term study of what he terms Songhay culture, what are the methodological implications of a plea for 'sharing taste' in contemporary multi-cultural, highly diverse societies? He further implies that achieving a certain level of cultural know-how requires particular methodological investments; the smells, sounds, and tastes of the places we study are crucial data for the construction of knowledge. How can we gain access to this incorporated knowledge? How does the (in)ability to recognise, to taste life, help or hinder research processes? How has access to incorporated knowledge, or taste, been a breakthrough in fieldwork?

Taste thus forges social relations and causes separations, it allows the bridging of differences even as it is central to the reproduction of inequalities. It is central to processes of recognition and as such it is key to processes of daily practices and ideas of inclusion and exclusion. Taste concerns both *savoir vivre* and *savoir faire* and is a window to a world of cultural practices.

The editors of ETNOFOOR invite all those who wish to reflect upon these or related issues to send an abstract of no more than 150 words to [editors@etnofoor.nl](mailto:editors@etnofoor.nl) before 1 February 2012. The deadline for authors of accepted abstracts to submit their full paper for consideration is 15 May 2012. We would like to remind potential contributors that ETNOFOOR offers an

experimental and creative space to those who want to free themselves from conventional scientific representations and that ETNOFOOR greatly endorses contributors who seek to innovate in style, image, and layout.

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